



CHAYAT HASHAVUA: ANT

CAN ANYONE TEACH US THE HEBREW WORD FOR ANT?

- It's *nemalah* (נְמַלָּה).
- One Hebrew dictionary (Jastrow) says that the word *nemalah* is derived from the root *amail* (עֲמַל), which means to toil or do very hard work.
- Although we know that ants are insects, one of the lowest forms of animal, they might seem like people to us after seeing the movie "A Bug's Life."

HAS ANYONE HERE SEEN "A BUG'S LIFE"?—AND, IF SO, WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM IT ABOUT ANTS?

- They're united.
- They're well organized.
- They're very hard-working.
- And they accomplish a lot although they're very small.

STRANGELY ENOUGH, ANTS ARE ALSO SAID TO BE VERY HONEST.

- Rabbi Yohanan taught almost 2,000 years ago that, "If the Torah had not been given, we could have learned . . . honesty from the ant. . . ." (Eruvin 100b)
- Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta, who also lived very long ago, once saw that after an ant dropped a grain of wheat it was carrying, all the other ants following behind smelled the grain as they passed but none would touch it—and after a while the ant that dropped it came back to get it.

CAN ANYONE TEACH US WHY, IN THE REAL WORLD, ANTS ARE SO IMPORTANT?

- They recycle plant material.
- They spread out seeds.
- And they turn the soil.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT ANTS THAT WE DON'T LIKE?

- They come into our houses and get into our food.
- The red fire ant, which forms in large groups in mounds, can be a problem for mechanical farm equipment, do damage to crops, and kill or injure farm animals.
- Some ants, like the red fire ant, can sting or bite.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ANTS WHEN THEY BECOME A PROBLEM?

- Use pesticides—but they're often much more of a problem than the ants.

- Use other products that are not toxic to deter them, like powered chalk that's sold in Oriental grocery stores.
- Seal up the openings they use to get into the house.
- Learn to live with them.

IT'S TIME FOR THE ANT QUIZ!

- What's your best guess on how many different types of ants there are in the world? (About 8800.)
- What's the total weight of all the ants in the world? (In the Amazon forest alone, the "biological mass" of the ants—that's kind of like the total weight—is thought to be four times greater than that of all animals that have a vertebrae, what we call a backbone, which is all of the larger and best known animals.)
- Does anyone know why ants are like bears? (They're mostly inactive, hibernating, during the winter.)

EVEN THE GREAT KING SOLOMON LEARNED AN IMPORTANT LESSON FROM THE ANT. (Legends of the Jews)

- Solomon once strayed into the valley of the ants.
- He heard one ant order all the others to withdraw so they wouldn't be crushed by his army; so Solomon stopped and summoned the ant who gave the order.
- He wanted to ask her a question, but she refused to answer unless the King picked her up and put her on his hand—which he finally did.
- Solomon then asked her: "Is there anyone greater than I am in all the world?"
- "Yes, there is," she answered.
- "Who?!" he roared at her.
- "I am," she replied.
- "How is *that* possible?" the King demanded.
- To which she answered, "Were I not greater than you, God would not have led you here to put me on your hand."
- Fed up, Solomon threw her to the ground and bellowed, "Do you know who I am? I am Solomon, the *King*!"
- Not the least bit bothered by his outburst, the ant answered: "O great king, did you not come from the earth?—in the future you should remember your humble beginnings."
- At that, Solomon went on his way.
- What do you think Solomon learned from his encounter with the ant?



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